

ROBERT IWAMOTO

I am a retired NOAA fisheries scientist with a PhD in fisheries genetics from the University of Washington. During my career with NOAA and the academic and private sectors, I have been involved with many of the key scientific issues and questions that are ultimately relative to Cooke Aquaculture's current permit request for the net-pen rearing of steelhead in Puget Sound. I am aware of both sides of the current debate having been part of NOAA Fisheries' scientific teams that helped guide and evaluate the ESA-listing decisions for West Coast salmonids as well as being a member of the aquaculture community.

Having evaluated the scientific evidence, I can unequivocally state that the benefits of Cooke Aquaculture's petition far outweigh any possible negative outcomes. With the current permitting regulations and best management practices, the possibility of large-scale losses and escapes should be minimized. Furthermore, the use of triploidized fish that are derived from highly domesticated strains should drive the odds of possible competition and interbreeding with local populations even closer to zero due to inherent reproduction- and fitness-related barriers.

I fully support Cooke Aquaculture's permit modification. I believe that the possible negative effects of Cooke Aquaculture's plans with steelhead farming are extremely over-stated and that the science underlying their request should determine the final decision.